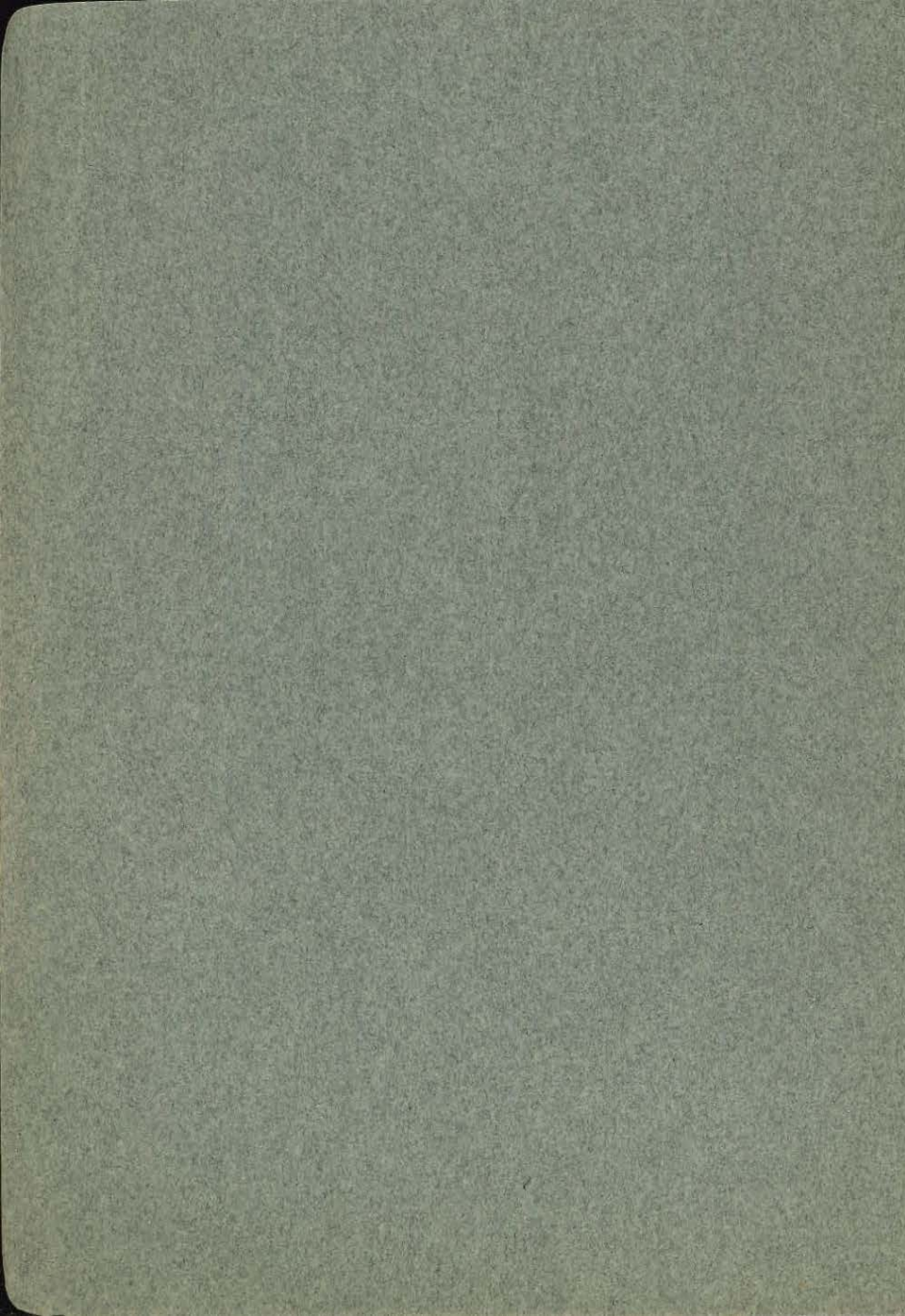


*Between Doubting
& Daring*



Jane Barlow



BETWEEN DOUBTING AND DARING

VERSES

BY

JANE BARLOW

'Faring

Far forward as folk in a dream,
That strive between doubting and daring
Right on '

In the Salt Marshes (Swinburne).

Oxford

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Contents

	PAGE
HARVEST, A.D. 1914 - - - - -	1
THE IRISH ARCHANGEL - - - - -	3
THE UNWELCOME GUEST - - - - -	7
A KNEEL AND A CHIME - - - - -	8
FOR COMPANY - - - - -	10
DIVISION - - - - -	11
A LATE POST - - - - -	12
A HAPCHANCE ORACLE - - - - -	13
FOR HERSELF ALONE - - - - -	14
THE END - - - - -	15
A DREAM BY THE WILD WATER - - - - -	16
A FARMER'S FIELDS - - - - -	17
A LOST FRIEND - - - - -	19
ONE FOR SORROW - - - - -	24
SORROW FOR ONE - - - - -	24
A LAGGARD IN LOVE - - - - -	25
THE OVER-HASTY - - - - -	26
A WANT-WIT - - - - -	27
A CONJECTURAL EMENDATION - - - - -	29
REGENERATION - - - - -	31
SONG OF A SPRITE SET FREE - - - - -	32
THE CULPRIT - - - - -	34

THE first eight poems in this volume appeared in the *Nation*; 'The End' and 'A Conjectural Emendation' in the *Athenæum*, and 'A Farmer's Fields' and 'A Lost Friend' in the *Saturday Review*. I am indebted to the Editors of these Journals for permission to reprint them here.

Harvest, A.D. 1914

(By the Wayside)

I

O'ER harvest hills soft haze of shimmering heat
Folds blue and dim; glows fiery sheen of wheat
At core of amber sunbeams; kindled white
The road creeps in beneath green shadow plight
Of woven branches. Here two gossips greet:
'Good morning ma'am; sure 'tis the grand hot day.'
'Aye, aye, too hot for our poor lads away
Off yonder in the battles where they fight.'
'Ah, cold enough, God knows, before this night
'Tis many a one will sleep.'

Such talk have they
Along the footpaths flecked with leaves and light.

II

The road glares like a white-hot ploughshare thrust
Athwart the plain, whereon a rider lone
Three times the blaze of noontide fierce hath known,
Mocked with the parching air, the blinding dust,
For all his daily fare; still, grown half-blind,
Goes stumbling, starved, and goads his starving horse
With ruthless steel, that rage may leave remorse
The more to sadden his sick heart. Yet shined
This summer day that ripens the red-gold corn

HARVEST, A.D. 1914

In rustling fields, on none whose lot forlorn
Draws nigh through heavier hours a desolate end ;
Since comes in foeman's guise his one grim friend,
Nor holds his cruel doom a kinder fate
Than if ere close the sunset's fire-silled gate,
Some long-flamed shaft a curven blade should bend
And thither so reach, that, reaped as harvest fruit,
Be to the great Dark gathered man and brute.

The Irish Archangel*

(Michaelmas, 1915)

AH Michael, Michael, listen Angel asthore !
[So in her heart Theresa Nolan said,
Kneeling at Mass on the wide chapel-floor,
Eyes lifted where, above her grey-shawled head,
The great bright window stained the morning rays
That pierced it, rose-red clear and amber turned.
Across the hills she had fared by handsbreadth ways,
Seaming long slopes, where froned fire yet burned,
And heather-bells had climbed up shoulder-high
On writhen stems in smouldering wrecks of flame.
With lonesome thoughts by lonesome paths she came,
Since feet trod far that once had followed nigh.]

Ah Michael, Michael, many's the time before
I have seen you shining there athwart the light,
With those grand wings on you, all glistening white
Like sailing clouds, when in at yonder door
From beneath the sun we'd step half blind—'twas ere
The Big War took our lads—and then the sight
Did my heart good, so strong you stand to scare
The Devil's own self, and drive him down his lair.
But now this trouble's on us, let him be :
There's worse folk loose about the world than he.
For doing harm belike was all his share

* Called so in Ireland because Michael is such a common name there.

THE IRISH ARCHANGEL

Of ever doing aught; but Lords and Kings
Might easy put a hand to better things
Than raising up a war, that ere 'tis done
Strikes thousands dead, and each a mother's son;
That's bitter desolation bound to bring,
With ruin and sorrow. Piled up heap on heap,
Like fluttered leaves you see the cold blasts sweep
Below the trees, the Dead are lying flung
Where Mick is fighting now. Ah Michael, keep
An eye on him, and sort him out among
The rest, for many a Mick is soldiering there,
And every one of them a decent lad,
But Micky's all the sons that ever I had—
You'd get none kinder if you searched Kildare.
And he a gossoon yet; a while ago
Scarce any size on him, the creature, or sense,
Just playing around, or maybe coaxing pence
For sweets—my grief that ever I said him no.
So mind him, Michael, that's a Michael too,
And make a shift to bring him safely through,
And home to me before they've laid him low.

Who stirred it up, God knows, had little to do:
This Big War beats the wildest wind e'er blew
For breaking hearts and driving people mad.
Sure, after a storm you might be thinking bad
To see the fine trees fallen there, overthrown,
Not fret for them, nor feel the house so lone

THE IRISH ARCHANGEL

You doubt the sun has lost his way, he'll creep
So low to set; and when at last 'tis night,
Heart-scalded, scarce at all a body 'll sleep,
Or every minute's waking in a fright,
And making sure I heard the rifle click
That's cocked to kill him. Keep, and you'll do right,
One flourish of your blazing sword to blind
The ugly villain aiming at my Mick.
And dreaming I do be of the guns they wind
The bullets out of with a handle quick,
To riddle hundreds while a clock would tick;
And poison-clouds the poltroons send to choke
Our lads' lives out, far off, with stifling smoke—
'Tis at the thought of them my heart grows sick.
For if 'twas fighting fair with sword or lance,
Or, say, shillélaghs, or a blackthorn stick,
One with another gets an even chance;
But where that hail of Hell is pelting thick,
The best man counts for nought and strongest arm,
Unless some queer good-luck he has indeed,
Or a Great One like yourself 'twixt him and harm.

But half afeard I am lest scarce more heed
You give to us, and you in grandeur set,
An Angel over Angels, than we take
Of beasts that stray about the fields to feed
As best they may out under dry and wet,
And chance their shelter when the black storms break.

THE IRISH ARCHANGEL

Aye, Michael, I misdoubt yourself that see
From high above thinks little of Mick and me
As if some old grey hen that lost her chick
Went clucking after it : *Micky, Mick avic!*

Yet, Michael, listen now—I'm hoping still
In all your glory you'll contrive a plan
To help us on a sudden, ere they fill
Wide earth with graves. For, Michael, if you've got
The wings itself, at heart you're just a man :
You won't delay till all the lads are shot.
Troth, I'd ne'er grudge the worst you'd blast and ban
Those miscreants-of-the-world that first began
The killing ; but save poor Mick, whate'er befall,
And every Mick among them, if you can—
Aye, bring the lads home, Michael, bring them all.

The Unwelcome Guest

(*Holy Eve, 1915*)

OFt, since 'tis old she has grown,
Whom the grudging days bereave,
Year on long year and lone,
Till her thoughts on their dim path tire,
Turned back so far to grieve—
Oft, when falls Holy Eve,
Part hoping, part adread,
She has heaped the sods of her fire,
And here in its flickering glow
Has the meal, remembering, spread
For you, O her heart's desire,
For you faring home from the Dead.

Nay, but she knows not this night
If the lad yet wake or sleep,
Lost in the far-off fight,
Where beyond the sound of our sea
Fierce battle-thunders sweep
Swift down a shoreless deep
Full many a dear-rued head.
Until dawn from fear set free,
Her heart can find no rest,
Still awaiting, sore bestead,
That loved unwelcome guest :
Lest loner than lone I be,
Come not home to me with the Dead.

A Knell and a Chime

METHOUGHT a mournful bell,
Fast by a shadowy sea,
Tolled through its hush and swell :
Qui bien aime tard oublie,
Qui bien aime tard oublie.
So lone the eve, nought stirred
But seemed to speak a word,
And ever thus said the knell :
Qui bien aime tard oublie.
O'er dusk waves, salt as tears
Their spray, tossed wild as fears,
Dimly it died. I trow
Some lover long ago
Had spoken it for a spell
That should his heart set free
From doubt's fell gramarie
Time-wrought : who loveth well
Doth tardily forget—
Qui bien aime tard oublie,
A vow, a promise, yet
Vainly it died and died,
Nor answering echoes met,
Where all grief's bitter tide
Beyond was waxen wide,
Till silence, grown a threat,
Would memory's doom foretell,
Lingering friend-lorn and left
At last to falter and flee

A KNELL AND A CHIME

The conqueror none may quell—
By tyrannous change twice-reft,
Qui bien aime tard oublie.

Then as stark midnight fell,
Turned from that desolate shore
To listen there no more
The bell make weary moan,
Methought anon were strown,
Dropped clear as dew's of light,
Notes thrilling, quivering far,
That down the vaulted height
Their crystal cadence flung,
Faint from some outpost star,
On fiery steeps aflame.
In jubilant peals outrung
The very voices came
Waft of a happy clime,
Where bells not toll but chime
Blithe tidings. *Qui bien aime,*
Tard, tard oublie, they run,
Qui bien aime tard oublie
Qui bien aime.

Ah to have won
Beside that shadowy sea,
A haven-nook of sleep,
And dream, and still dream deep
That such a joy shall be !

For Company

‘’TIS a word folk have,’ said she, ‘how there does be
ever sore weeping

For the light of heart who go from their life to their death
with laughter.’

Lone stood the House, all hushed in stark silence from
threshold to rafter;

Only a bent little crone at the summons, mouse-paced, came
creeping.

‘Laughing he was, Master Mac, with the lads that last
minute, they say :

Laughing he’d be, sure enough, with the Squire, they two,
here in the hall.

Yon’s his cap I hung nigh the poor Master’s, that’s desolate
left with it all,

Just for company like,’ she said. But between, ah, the void
Deep lay.

Division

GIVE Norah Shane, poor soul, who begs her bread,
The penny that she asks,
To bring down showers of blessing on your head
A nimble tongue she tasks;
'Long may ye live, and happy may ye die,'
Oft and again I have heard her prayer framed so:
She called it after us when he and I
Fared by a week ago . . .

Far lances flash, a bugle's shrill command,
In saddle all his troop;
To let him mount, his mare will hardly stand,
Full gallop off they swoop;
The fretting hooves throb free; he'd think so well
Fay never went; they ne'er at fence did ride
In such a glorious run. Down crashed the shell—
No fear! he happy died.

That both should see a whole good wish come true
Was more than Fate could grant.
If Norah's boon thus halved between us two,
One share of joy be scant,
Accept I yet the dole I would fain forego;
Since fair his lot, mine own must needs forgive;
Yea learn alone while days—while hours—creep slow,
How years are long to live.

A Late Post

CLEAR looks the sad day's close,
Ere eyes their watch forsake :
With all the West one rose

Long-rayed, so late it grows
No letter shall she take.
Clear looks the sad day's close

In mockery, since she knows
She must the hard vow make,
With all the West one rose,

That here her hope foregoes,
Till ever the slow morn wake.
Clear looks the sad day's close

On night-dark . . .
Nay, who throws
White through the slit this flake?
With all the West one rose,

Plain her boy's writing shows,
Though caught in hands that shake—
Clear looks the sad day's close,
With all the West one rose

A Hapchance Oracle

HEART'S rest it seems their kindly talk to leave,
Who this for comfort hold, and fain would share :
Not far off bide our Dead, they say, and cleave
New access for despair.

As if no dread vast deeps should hide the star
Evanished from our void and darkling air,
When, verily, except it shine afar,
It shines not anywhere ;

Nor ever a ray thereof shall hope retrieve
That fared not forth on paths of loneliest light . . .

Here soft falls silence down the hushed grey eve,
The unfooted road curves white.

Some lads pass, trampling up a dust-cloud dim,
All brownly garbed as soil that labour delves :
Deathward they march to humour a mad world's whim,
And sing to please themselves.

A witless song ; yet haply, overheard,
Fraught with the lore that Fortune sends us so :
A long, long way to go ; aye, take the word :
A long, long way—to go.

For Herself Alone

(To Sinn Fein Ireland: Easter, 1916)

SINCE first o'er crested foam our sun's fire flashed to thee,

Never yet was come a call to such fortune fair and high;
Through a storm of strife it cried that thy share of life and crown

Thou should'st win thee, Ireland, with long, with loved renown,

Fast leagued with all the Nations of the Free,
Where to have fought is fame, and glory it is to die.

Thy true sons, hearkening, left thee full many a hero's name.

These all thou hast clean forgotten; by evil arts misled
To thy bitter woe hast followed, strayed from ancient honour afar,

Basest foes whose steps defile the blood-stained ways of war—

My heart's grief, Ireland! this bides ever thy shame
That thy faith thou hast broken, and hast betrayed thy Dead.

It was not to be then, Ireland, soothly never to be.
Thou hast slain the hope, and now as from a face grown still and white

To look back again no more, so from thee we turn away,
With a sad word only for last farewell to say:

*Sleep a long sleep, Ireland, lone in thy lone sea,
Dream no dreams, Ireland, dark in thy dark night.*

The End

Φιλόφρον Ἥσυχία
τὸ γὰρ τὸ μαλθακὸν ἔρξαι τε καὶ παθεῖν ὁμῶς
ἐπίστασαι καιρῷ σὺν ατρεκει·
τὸ δ', ὅποταν τις ἀμείλιχον
καρδίᾳ κότον ἐνελάσῃ
τραχέια δυσμενέων
ὑπαντιάζαισα κράτει τιθεῖς
ὕβριν ἐν ἄντλῳ.—PINDAR, *Pythian viii*.

SINCE yet a wilder storm its clamorous woe
About all homes must wail, and field by field
Grow full of graves, and Youth's blithe heyday yield,
Quelled in the bitter death-hour, quenching so
The hope of Age bereft; since halt must go
More swift feet, more sun-loving eyes be sealed
In livelong dark; since lust and ravin wield
The brute's fell power o'er right and ruth laid low :

Yea, since through clouds that weave a night in night
One lonely camp-fire fades from hosts afar,
Whither still in loss and scathe and ruin's despite
Toil we as men whose quest is toward a star :
Even for this cause, though Hell waste Earth, we fight
To no war's end save endless end of War.

A Dream by the Wild Water

STILL-looked, yon star o'er the wild water
Through deeps of night, from a bourne unknown,
Dim-flickering rays down the void vast hollow
Sends thrilled afar where no thought dare follow,
So dread the ways that aloof and lone
Lead hither his light to the wild water.

Yet dream there came to the wild water
A word that said how, past sun on sun,
Yon frail star-flame as a dew-fleck burning,
Their eyes behold, who no more returning,
Drear morn breaks cold on our world undone,
All good days fled from the wild water :

For you, thus grieved by the wild water,
Soothsay of Spring on stark winter's air
That word would bring, with strange joy betiding,
Lost life retrieved, and old love abiding,
And hope a-wing from spell-stopped despair
Would soar and sing o'er the wild water.

A Farmer's Fields

ON the hill-slope in the sun
There his fields lie ; every one
Glows a jewel, where evening light
Stays its flight from dusk begun.

O'er them curved a crested height
Rims the East whence dawns the night ;
High they climb this flitting day's
Long clear rays to front aright.

By her door she stands at gaze,
Strange looks bent on olden ways ;
In a silence newly grown
Waits alone while dark delays.

All their chequered ploughed-and-sown,
Spiny furze-bush, briery stone,
Through their changing brown and green,
Silken sheen, and blossom strown,

Under shine and shadow seen,
Joy to her and care have been ;
Now they seem a cloud-veiled shore
With the roar of waves between.

' Many a time he'd look them o'er,
Late and early, from this door ;
Many a time, heart-vexed and crossed,
See storm-tossed his little store.

' Aye,' she says, ' to bitter cost
Came against him blight and frost,

A FARMER'S FIELDS

Rain and drought, and all the rest;
Try his best, 'twas labour lost.

' Oft-times ruffled like the breast
Of a kestrel-struck woodquest
Lay his feathery oats, for so
Wild 'twill blow from yonder West.

' Or a sea-fog, drifted low,
Left the 'taties row by row
Blackened; for one creel he'd fill,
Half a drill away he'd throw.

' Sure hard task he had to till
Just the bare side of the hill,
Let alone with wind and wet
On him set by the Lord's will.

' Still, proud man he was, if yet
God be praised, good luck he met:
When his oats were fit to reap,
Scarce he'd sleep till out he'd get.'

While she watches, o'er the steep
Dim white mists float down and sweep;
From each field that shimmering lies
Brightness dies as on they creep.

These may lift 'neath dawn-flushed skies:
Mists that from the farmer's eyes
Hid his bit of land, though morn
Break forlorn, no more shall rise.

A Lost Friend

FROM westward tramped, about this countryside
He had come long since, nor more of him was known.
For miles around his basket's tinware shone,
Blanching a sunbeam; lean and wistful-eyed
He ever was of look; a wordless lay
He crooned, as if went by a wild bee's drone:
That low faint humming foretold his coming,
And said he had left behind a lonesome way.

Halting anon, he scarce made longer stay
Than thistle tufts that fitful breezes guide,
Save only where the bridge with arch too wide
O'ervaults the road-crossed river. If close of day
Had brought him thither, oft on the wall's flagged ledge
He would lean to watch the ripples as they hied,
With murmuring soft, foam-frosted at the edge.

Drought cast o'er all the land one summer-tide
A dumbing spell: lake-water lapt the sedge
Low sunk; no runlet 'neath the dusty hedge
Sped, under greenery glancing half espied;
Shrunk from crystal brim, the dripless well
Mocked not in faery forge a tinkling sledge,
Nor, knolled from elfin towers, a gleeful knell.

Then on a morn his face paused by a door,
There many a day unseen, and straightway told

A LOST FRIEND

Of sorrow fallen anew on sorrow old,
For, graven afresh, grief's charactery it bore.
' Since last I came this road, my luck was bad,'
Quoth he : ' Great lack falls oft on little store ;
So now I have lost the kindest friend I had.

' Two hours the sun was down below yon ridge,
And left the darkest sky of all this year,
When yestereve I came to where I'd hear
Herself discoursing underneath the bridge.
She had many a pleasant voice, yet still the same ;
'Twas lief I listened. Whiles when I was near
Calling she seemed naught else but my own name.

' Full sure I made I'd hear her voice aright,
The sooner that I walked so late and lone.
A kindly word she had for every stone :
I must have heard her speaking through the night.
I heard no sound. The world kept hushed as death.
In troth I knew. Yet there for glimmer of light
I waited sick at heart, and held my breath.

' And what I had known, when dawn crept back again,
My eyes beheld ; for stirless as yon hill
She lay, cleft through, where, thrust out grey and chill,
A shingle-bar with sharp-edged blade had ta'en
The life of her, struck silent so. Thinks I
Mayhap she called me from those shadows still,
And I far off, that now can ne'er come nigh.

A LOST FRIEND.

'But he who furthest fares belike more ill
Meets not than he who bides while all things change;
For both must see them yet grown drear and strange;
Aye, both pass oft through open doorways, till
They find a sudden wall built up instead.'

With that he turned his lonelier world to range,
And now his path along crooned never an echoed song,
Because the old kind voice he loved was dead.

One for Sorrow

(*A Magpie Scarecrow*)

ONE for sorrow is hanged up on a pole
To fright away keen beaks from young corn ;
The crows, his dusky kin, no funeral dole
Made o'er his doom so forlorn ;
Yet hoarse and harsh their din
Grates from yon mirk cloud wheeling
Round leafy towers, concealing,
Close-boughed, the careful broods within.

One for sorrow sees not where blossom-drift
Muffles the hedgerow thorn,
Sheer foam and snow, till loftiest sprays uplift
Be softlier swathed about than e'er with fleece,
From flocks white-glimmering shorn,
Was suppliant's wool-lapt wand,
Borne forth at need to some God-friend in Greece ;
Hears not, fresh meads beyond,
The voice a-wing, that lighting holds its peace,
Cry still, dew-clear, and call,
As from an elfin clime,
With gleeful bells a-chime—
One for sorrow is blind, is deaf to all.

ONE FOR SORROW

Two for mirth they sit perched up in a tree,
Whose airy branches shade the fledged bole;
Long quills droop satin-sleek, eyes glittering glee
Gloat o'er the treasure they stole,
Pink shred with tinsel streak;
For wide earth, theirs to rifle
Of many a precious trifle,
Permits their peering hop oblique.

Two for mirth, all in sable sapphire dight,
Pearly of vest, a goal
Of gladness in this low sun's westering light
Have gained fast by their garnished robbers' nest,
Their thievery dear and droll;
And when they weary of ease,
Out swoops their lucky flight on venturous quest.
Ranging as fancies please
Through fields afar, anigh with jocund zest,
Beneath blue mid-May weather,
From speedwell's gem sward-set
To fir's tall minaret,
Two for mirth taste the year's gay prime together.

Sorrow for One

SORROW for one : nay, sorrow hath he none,
His griefs all left behind
This side the sun,
Yet mirth for two makes evermore pursue
The frown of Fate unkind,
That one shall rue ;
If one be left to bear in mournful mind
Lost noontide gleams, and how the world went well
When gloaming fell ;
To ask, nor answer win,
If, sorrow ended, haply joy begin,
Threaded as day and night,
Dark beads and bright,
On strands the self-same life shall spin.
Was never a spell that could response compel ;
No secret word from any ominous bird ;
Only for wistful vows most vainly stirred
The woodland stillness with the cushat's croon ;
And ever the cuckoo's echoing crystal bell
Rings on, a dwindled knell,
That swims away to dreamful shores of sleep.
Ah wake there, wake a soothfast oracle,
Or silence keep.

Two Pastorals

I. A LAGGARD IN LOVE.

HIGH noon was aflame on the hills far and wide,
When leaned on his crook stood a shepherd who
sighed :

'Now woe worth the day, see how Phyllida fares
Up yonder green slope that no fierce sunbeam spares.

'Ah ! would that my shepherdess tended her sheep
Low down in the vale under boughs close and deep ;
For fain would I walk where the cool shadow lies,
Yet fain would I look into Phyllida's eyes.'

Thus plained the vexed shepherd, whom sorrow betid,
For his flock roved afield while his fortune he chid ;
So needs must he follow, and at night's sill they strayed
Where Phyllida laughed with his friend in the shade.

OVER-HASTY

II. OVER-HASTY.

LOW down in the vale he was leading his flock,
Where sleepeth blue shadow beneath the cold rock,
When off up the hill rang a call fluted high,
Till echoes around him grew rife far and nigh :
‘ Haste thee, shepherd, haste hither ! ’

He gazed up amain, up the slope smooth and steep,
Nor marked on its green the white fleeces acreep,
For there, beam in sunbeam, stood she who had cried,
Young Sylvia the fair, and ere echo’s note died
His fain heart had leaped thither.

Yet mute while he hung on those cadences clear,
A voice fast beside him fell harsh on his ear ;
’Twas Damon who answered, ’twas Damon she sought,
So hope newly culled drooped and dwindled to nought,
As a crushed weed might wither.

A Want-Wit

THE long, strait pastures threaded on the stream
All night beneath soft rain-showers lay a-dream,
But waked when rose-red clearness still increased
Beyond one low grey cloud that rimmed the East
In stone-wall country-wise. For then the sun
Smote gems' fire from the blade-drops all and one,
Yet wrought them cells unseen in crystal air
Ray-warmed, till soon they had vanished everywhere.
Only the tangled grass along the hedges
Trailed coldly drenched; the ripple side of the sedges
Scarce wetter footing yielded; none the less,
Even there, in shelter of some bush-screened recess,
The briars and little thorn-leaves curtained round
Had let no drop prick through. The brown bare ground
In one of these close nooks by ruins showed
That there o'ernight a ruddy flame had glowed;
For ashes white on crookt twigs black and charred
Flaked thick, as if, indeed, the feathers barred
Silver and sable, wear of furtive pye,
Lay plucked and strewn. And on the bank anigh
Sat blinking at the sun, his dark head flecked
With rime frost, he who had reared that fire now wrecked.

'Twas Joe the Fool, met oft on many a road;
Beside him shone his nowise heavy load,
Tin cans a few, and mugs, and platters small,
Whence flashed, the sunbeams blanched and dazzling all,
Came bickered. But Joe's eyes a wilder light
Held constantly than flits at fall of night
On glancing wings about the skies' far height,

A WANT-WIT

Ne'er caught and caged to make a sheen discreet
In silent chamber or in bustling street.
And here they look half puzzled, scarce awake,
From paths of slumber jostled by a shake
Suddenly; and gruff the voice that hailed him back
To tread this earth. 'Come now, my man, just pack.
You're trespassing on private lands; no place
For you at all.' Whereon with sauntering pace,
Along the hedge had passed, in cap and cape,
'Twixt shadow and shine the sombre portly shape.

But Joe the Fool a while yet round him gazed
In meditation haply that appraised
The interwoven green and airy rift
Of azure, glistening with the snow-cloud's drift,
The patient droop of seed-plumed grass, the cry
From bird to bird, and stream's song crooning by.
Said then to himself: 'The sorrow a bit I see
What ails this place; 'tis well enough for me.
Queer talk the pólís do be having. Sure
You'd think there was no place but owned a door,
And they the key. Howe'er, I'm stepping on,
And apt to find as good before I'm gone
A great way further.' So, with hand deep-curved
To shield the tiny flame that swayed and swerved
In breeze's breath, his morning pipe he lit.
'My notion is, poor man, he wants the wit,
And arguing with a one that's short of it
Is labour lost. You might as soon,' he said,
'Make shift to strike a match without a head.'

A Conjectural Emendation

(*Antigone* 4)

THE old grey house this many a year stands lone,
With grass-lands wide begirt; and grey and old
This many a lonely year its master, grown
A bookworm haunting places blurred with mould,
In the long narrow brown-walled library reads,
Or oftener, haply, if the truth were told,
But wanders through a dream as memory leads
His steps forlorn; still, whitherso'er it guide him,
Yon portly tome, green-clad like faded meads,
Lies open beside him.

Much learning gathered up the spread leaf shows:
One verse of Sophocles, a dubious text,
Whereon a stream of comment overflows,
Sprung variously, from this page to the next.
No scholar through that clouded script sees clear
How sad Antigone her fate sore vexed
Arraigned, and they to whom the words appear
That lift the haze do soothly but increase it.
Amongst them Thomas Dale "Ἀτῆς αἴτ' ἦρ
Inepte conjecit.

His heavy pencil's point has underlined
With scoring blue and broad the censured name,
But Thomas Dale has never a whit repined,
Nay, rather prizes the recorded blame;

A CONJECTURAL EMENDATION

For so he trusts by power of printing press
He shall not pass away unknown to fame.
Deem you that note his essay's ill success
In pillory sets, whence fain he would release it?
A shrewder critic marks against your guess :
Inepte conjecit.

Regeneration

UP at the Big House, at the Sale last week,
The books fetched next to nothing; by the stone
They mostly went; you had them, so to speak
For just the carrying off. Well, if I'd known,

I might have brought the ass, and taken a load
In sacks, but missed the chance; small loss I thought it,
Considering time extremely ill bestowed
In reading stupid stuff because you've bought it.

The rest was offered by the hundredweight,
Which means waste-paper and the pulping mill;
A worthless lot; you'd count, at any rate,
Their like good riddance from the room they fill:

Old sermons, tracts, long *Lives* of God knows who,
Epitomes, learned manuals out of date.
The brown blurred print would strain your eyes, and you
Be none the wiser—'twas their righteous fate.

Yet, when from factory-turmoil into calms
Emerged, what capable and fleckless sheets,
Clear of *McKenzie on the Cursing Psalms*,
May bear, as leaves flash dew, some Ode of Keats.

Song of a Sprite Set Free

THE wind hath a way
That he needs must keep,
He dare not wander
Though the stars beck : ' Stray
Yonder and yonder
Where far skies bend deep
O'er a stranger day
Than the dreams of sleep '—
He may storm on his way,
But he shall not wander.

The wave hath a way
For his reared up foam,
Come seething, slidden ;
With his crested spray
Faring forbidden
From one path to roam
Must its bounds obey,
Yet his heart's wild home
Fain would seek by a way
To his surge forbidden.

SONG OF A SPRITE SET FREE

My wings find no way
In the width of the world
Can bar the brightening
Of their fire-fledged ray ;
Laggard is lightning
To their flight unfurled
In my fancy's sway
Wheresoe'er 'tis whirled,
As they flash on their way,
And leave laggard lightning.

The Culprit

WENT up a clamour, a cry, begun
 'Neath shrouding wings of night,
For deeds that could make dark a sun,
If dared in heaven's good light;
With woe and bitterest wrath it won,
Wailing, the welkin's height.

Impierceable the shadow lay
As veil of hidden doom
Whereby fate lists our steps betray
Unaware; from out that gloom
Only lamenting rose alway
To fill the world's wide room.

Then lo, as if the brooding dark confesst
Its secret dire,
Strode forth one armed from heel to lofty crest
With mail like fire
Smouldering on embers dulled, yet ever addresst
To blaze in ire.

But, drawn in his Titan's grasp, the brand he bore
Seemed very flame;
A mighty blade, entitled as of yore
Be they whose fame
Bides chronicled; yea have men cursed it sore
By many a name.

THE CULPRIT

Its wielder's hand no thralling ruth
Withheld, whose glaive had slain
A myriadfold earth's flower of youth,
And still for deeper stain
Glowed greedily. That it now in sooth
Should keenlier bite again

With finer edge unflawed, if any place
Fierce strokes impaired,
Flashed to and fro thwart a grim crag's smooth face
Like levin it flared.
(Fraught with wild griefs from yonder stricken race,
Loud winds despaired).

He wrought till it burned from point to hilt
As first new-forged, ere fell
On lives innumerably spilt
Its bale-fire's blinding spell;
While even as lads light-hearted lilt
O'er tasks that like them well,

Now hum a stave, now haply troll thereof
Some clearer word,
So rose this slayer's careless song above
His whetted sword;
And ever said thus the burden : *life is love*
And love is Lord.

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